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*Vice Chair House Democratic Caucus*

# **Congressman James E. Clyburn**

*Sixth District, South Carolina*

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

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### **Congressmen James Clyburn and John Spratt Commend Florence County's Contribution to Production of new AIDS drug**

(Washington, D.C.)—The U.S. Food and Drug Administration yesterday announced approval for Fuzeon, the first in a new class of anti-HIV drugs. The new drug, developed by Hoffman-La Roche in partnership with Trimeris, Inc., is both a medical and a manufacturing breakthrough.

Congressmen James Clyburn (D-SC) and John Spratt (D-SC) today commended the Florence-based Roche plant's contribution to this medical advancement. Fuzeon is one of the most complex medicines ever developed on a large scale. The Florence plant, which employs 300 workers from seven surrounding counties, manufactures an essential amino acid that is contained in Fuzeon.

Fuzeon is the first of a new class of drugs—fusion inhibitors—that attack HIV in a new way; by helping to block HIV from fusing with the patient's cells. This will help the increasing number of patients who have developed resistance to existing treatments.

In South Carolina, over 5,000 people are currently living with AIDS, and nearly 700 new HIV cases were reported in 2001 alone.

"HIV continues to be a major challenge here in South Carolina, a state that has the eighth highest rate of AIDS cases in the United States," noted Congressman Clyburn. "This drug will help the most medically challenged patients living with HIV in South Carolina, the United States and elsewhere in the world to live longer, healthier lives," the Congressman added.

"South Carolinians should be proud that a critical material used to make Fuzeon is produced in Roche's South Carolina facility—a plant that employs 300 workers in the Florence County region," said Congressman Spratt.

Treatments like Fuzeon will keep Americans with HIV/AIDS alive and healthy for longer periods of time. New advances bring new costs, however. At least 20% of Americans living with HIV have no insurance to cover the drugs that keep them alive. Most of these patients are dependent on the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) funded under the Ryan White CARE Act.

“This year, Congress provided an \$80 million increase for ADAPs. This is a step in the right direction, but even more funding will be needed to help ADAPs stay solvent and meet the needs of people with HIV/AIDS,” said Congressman Clyburn.

“Over 800 South Carolinians are dependent on ADAP for their HIV medications. Congress must ensure sufficient funding for the program. In the future we must find a more complete solution to this problem. Today, a person with HIV has to become disabled to get access to Medicaid and to the treatments that could prevent them from being disabled in the first place. I support the Early Treatment for HIV Act that would provide comprehensive health care to uninsured people with HIV to keep them from becoming disabled. It makes sense medically, ethically, and financially, “ said Congressman Spratt.

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